

1. GREECE AND THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

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Greece **and** the new Middle East

COMMENTARY

BY GEORGE N. TZOGOPOULOS *

The **accord** between Israel **and** the United Arab Emirates was signed at the White House yesterday. The ceremony was also attended by Bahrain, which became the fourth Arab country, after Egypt, Jordan **and** the UAE, to recognize Israel. Israel, **for** its part, is stepping back from its plan to annex parts of the West Bank.

The Greek Ministry of **Foreign** Affairs sees the so-called Abraham Accord as a potentially “major step **for** the establishment of dialogue **and** mutual understanding between the peoples of the Middle East” **and** has also welcomed Bahrain’s decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. The historic deal **and** its impact on international affairs was at the center of attention during a virtual discussion of B’nai B’rith **Israel-Hellenic** Forum that the author co-convenes.

It is necessary **for** Greece to carefully monitor changes in the Middle East landscape. Although the Palestinian cause has not lost support among Arab countries, it arguably is no longer considered a priority. Israel, the UAE, Bahrain **and** some other Arab states place more emphasis on Iran. This is also the case **for** the American administration which brokered the Abraham Accord. Greece needs to find a delicate balance between its historical ties with the Palestinians as well as Iran **and** the new Middle East realities. Athens continuously supports the prospect of a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, **and** is aligned with the **European** Union position on Iran, although it certainly understands Israeli security concerns.

Additionally, Turkey appears highly critical of the normalization of ties between Israel, the UAE **and** Bahrain. In his effort to take the lead in the Muslim world, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is highly concerned about the consolidation of the alignment of other regional powers that might also encompass additional Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia in the future. This entails



US President Donald Trump welcomes the UAE **Foreign** Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan at the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday.

both opportunities **and** risks **for** the Greek government. While Greece along with Israel, the UAE, Bahrain **and** Saudi Arabia have some common interests at stake in the Eastern Mediterranean – **for** example in Libya – the country sometimes gives the impression it is entering an obscure military environment that contradicts its peace-loving philosophy. Another midway solution is required here.

Last but not least, President Donald Trump has shown he is able to score some significant **foreign policy** points. Whether the Abraham Accord, which was also followed by the agreement between Serbia **and** Kosovo, could be a precursor **for** a successful mediation in the Eastern Mediterranean remains to be seen. No doubt Trump delivers when he wants to.

Under the circumstances, Greece could intensify its effort to better promote its positions in the US. The momentum after the Abraham Accord favors the effort that should rather aim at both the president **and** the Congress.

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